

Meeting Minutes Natural Heritage Advisory Council

January 19, 2017

Minutes Approved: March 24, 2017

Natural Resources Building
1111 Washington Street
Olympia, Washington 98504

Council members present: Peter Dunwiddie, Adam Cole (for Sarah Gage), Sarah Gage (arrived about 11:35), Heather Kapust, Brock Milliern, Norm Schaaf, Heida Diefenderfer (via phone), Cathy Baker and Rob Fimbel (joined via phone about 12:30).

Staff present: John Gamon, Curt Pavola, John Fleckenstein, Mark Reed, Joe Arnett, Anika Goldner (NHP intern) and Paul McFarland.

- 1. Welcome and Introductions:** Dunwiddie called the meeting to order at 9:40 AM. Council members and staff introduced themselves. Chair Dundwiddie noted that the order of business would be modified to accommodate any late arriving council members.
- 2. Meeting Minutes from November 14, 2016:** Council action was deferred due to lack of a quorum.
- 3. Progress on Past Recommendations / Acquisitions Report:** Reed reported on natural area acquisitions since the November 2016 council meeting (see attached report); sites include Dabob Bay Natural Area, Middle Fork Snoqualmie NRCA, Mount Si NRCA. DNR will be closing on several more properties in February and March.
- 4. Update on Recent Expansion Recommendations:**
Dabob Bay – Gamon showed a map of the boundary approved by the Commissioner of Public Lands. Some modifications were made to the boundary that had been proposed and presented to the public in October 2016. A couple of landowners asked for their parcels to be included in the boundary; DNR trust land managers requested that (1) some lands be excluded from the boundary to maintain operability and (2) to add one parcel to the natural area because it is not needed for operability.

Dunwiddie said it is hard to get a sense of the ecological features inside or outside the boundary. Gamon clarified that the proposal did not originate from Natural Heritage analysis specifically, but rather more general information about Puget Sound and Hood Canal and the benefits and opportunities of protecting undeveloped shoreline areas. There are, however, ecological features of conservation interest within the designated boundary: a rare forest community type and estuarine features in Thorndyke Bay.

Devils Lake – The Commissioner of Public Lands approved the boundary expansion for this NRCA; the expansion added only DNR-managed trust lands. One issue identified through the public meeting and hearing was public access limitations and an interest by neighbors of the site to work with DNR on such issues. Region staff are looking at a potential trust land acquisition opportunity to the south of the expansion area that might allow access to the conservation area as well. Schaaf asked about staffing in Olympic Region and what their current capacity is. Gamon responded that there currently is no natural area staff in Olympic Region; South Puget Region provides limited staff

capacity for Olympic Region natural areas. Gamon provided an overview of the current operating budget request submitted to the Legislature by DNR, which includes adding a natural areas manager position for the Olympic Region. Our request has gained support from the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition and The Nature Conservancy (per Baker).

Klickitat Canyon – At the public hearing in Klickitat County for the potential NRCA expansion, DNR heard a strong concern (which we had also heard from the county commissioners) about retaining the ability to continue managing private forest lands for local economic benefits. The community supported designation of the site as a "community forest trust" with local representation on the management board. The Board of Natural Resources concurred with the community forest trust designation and the current plan is to have Columbia Land Trust manage the property under an agreement with DNR, and under a jointly developed management plan. Milliern said some are thinking about this project as perhaps a future model for community forests, being only a couple thousand acres versus the initial community forest of about 50,000 acres, at Teanaway in Kittitas County. Gamon clarified that funding for this transaction is from the Forest Legacy Program, which is administered by the U.S. Forest Service.

Kennedy Creek – Gamon showed the final map with the Commissioner-approved boundary for the creation of Kennedy Creek NRCA, which is adjacent to the existing natural area preserve, and discussed potential acquisition funding through the Washington Wildlife Recreation Program.

5. **Natural Heritage Plan:** Gamon discussed options regarding the timeframe for development of the Natural Heritage Plan. One would be to prepare a fairly minimal update of the plan, consisting primarily of revising the rankings and priorities for species and ecosystems and updating information on the statewide natural areas system (primarily summarizing acquisition efforts). Staff has essentially completed the necessary review. However, the process to complete the Natural Heritage Plan requires approval of the Commissioner of Public Lands and submittal to the legislature. A drawback to this option is the Commissioner's busy schedule, given that the legislature is in session, and the need to bring her up to speed on our work and the Natural Heritage Plan.

A second option would be to undertake a more thorough revision over the course of calendar year 2017, with the goal of finalizing a new plan in time for the 2018 legislative session. Gamon added that the Recreation and Conservation Office has a requirement that for agencies to be eligible for WWRP funds, they must have a statewide plan approved within 6 years of the grant funding cycle in which funds are being sought. Because the last update to the Natural Heritage Plan was approved in 2011, we absolutely need to get a new plan approved prior to the 2018 grant funding cycle (i.e., the 2011 plan would be older than 6 years, so would not give us eligibility).

This second option would give the Commissioner the opportunity to help shape the plan. Gamon also indicated that he would like to have conversations with land trusts and receive their input regarding conservation priorities and the statewide system of natural areas.

Schaaf suggested briefing the commissioner on the process to create the plan and to also note the need to appoint members to the NHAC. Milliern suggested that we need to get confirmation from RCO that approval of a new plan by the end of next legislative session would make us eligible for the 2018 grant cycle.

Council members and staff discussed ways in which the Natural Heritage Plan could convey more compelling and positive stories about the conservation efforts of the Natural Heritage and Natural Areas programs. A number of ideas were shared, including better use of maps and graphics to convey the conservation values on natural areas and perhaps using short stories or vignettes to communicate the variety of natural areas that we manage. It was noted that since the document is a “plan,” it needs to be forward-looking. It was also noted that we need to convey that DNR’s natural areas provide protection for priority species and ecosystems, i.e., we are not just doing conservation for conservation’s sake.

Dunwiddie asked if we might include a list of priority lichens; Arnett agreed that we have enough information to support including such a list. Diefenderfer suggested including information in the plan about funding sources and partners.

Baker asked about staff capacity in the Natural Heritage Program. Milliern said the new department supervisor (agency director) starts in about a week and we will get a sense of the process to fill any vacancies, specifically the Natural Heritage Program Manager position.

6. Agency Reports:

Recreation and Conservation Office: Sarah Gage shared news that Brian Abbott of RCO's Salmon Recovery Office passed away recently. He was highly regarded within RCO and by external partners with whom he worked. RCO staff is recovering from the loss and attempting to cover the needs of the office. Sarah is helping with this work.

For the RCO biennial report "State of Salmon in Watersheds" they published only an executive summary named “Governor’s Update.” The summary provides a quick reference, while details are on the website.

For the next RCO recreation plan, they are soliciting information via an online survey; everyone is eligible to participate.

RCO is proposing a number of changes to the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program, including timing, eligibility for non-profit organizations, scoring criteria dealing with public access and multiple benefits, and a possible match waiver for “underserved populations” or “communities in need.” The Recreation and Conservation Funding Board will address these topics in October.

Justin Bush of the Invasive Species Council got funding for three new projects: 1) network of first detectors, 2) two regional workshops for the Columbia River George with USDA, WSU Cooperative Extension and Skamania County, and 3) development of a management plan for flowering rush.

The Salmon Recovery Conference is coming up soon, and the call for papers is out. This will be the first time the conference will be on the eastside, in Wenatchee. Finally, WWRP now includes a new "forestland" category, focused on working forests.

Department of Ecology: Kapust reported that the main focus recently has been on National Coastal Wetlands Conservation grants for local entities. Ecology (and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service) awarded 6 Washington projects, including two that neighbor DNR-managed natural areas, one at Elk River and another on Henderson Inlet near Woodard Bay.

The department requested \$70 million for Floodplains by Design, and the governor's budget included \$20 million. Also, while the agency had a shortfall in Model Toxics Control Act funding, the governor fully funded it.

Department of Natural Resources: Milliern reported that new Commissioner of Public Lands Hilary Franz has been getting to know the agency and our programs. Some of the commissioner's top leadership team have been announced, while others are pending.

In addition to a number of projects in multiple WWRP grant categories, DNR is requesting legislative funding for a Natural Areas Program capital budget request, which the governor supported at about \$2 million of our \$4.4 request. A number of advocacy groups are offering to support DNR's operating and capital requests.

Some proposed legislation potentially could affect DNR's conservation work, including HB 1008 that would require all natural resource agencies to sell the same amount of land as they buy, for "no net gain." So far DNR has analyzed about 200 legislative bills; a brisker pace than the past couple of years.

Baker asked Milliern and Dunwiddie for a follow-up on the letter the Natural Heritage Advisory Council sent to the new Commissioner of Public Lands, Hilary Franz. Baker noted the letter included an invitation for the March council meeting and offered that would be a good time to orient her to the programs, and perhaps also show her the prairies in springtime. The council concurred, while noting the difficulty of scheduling time with the Commissioner while the Legislature is in session.

Milliern noted that the council has several vacancies and feels that we can get nominations to the commissioner at any time. Gamon added that Cynthia Wilkerson is taking a new WDFW position and won't be continuing on the council. Also, the "science" position term for Janelle Downs has expired, but she has indicated she'd like to continue. Wade Troutman's "agricultural representative" position also is expired and while he's willing to serve until the position is filled, he is wanting to step down. Other positions that have expired and need replacements are: Bob Meier (general public position), John Banks (science position), and Alan Black (science position). In addition, Commissioner Hilary Franz has appointed Dan Stonington as DNR's policy director and thus he has left the council, creating a "citizen at large" vacancy. Council members expressed hope that DNR could deliver a list of suggested appointees to the commissioner in time for members to be appointed and attend the March council meeting. Gamon asked council members to contact him with ideas for additional nominations for the council.

State Parks and Recreation Commission: Fimbel reported that the agency is continuing to research and understand the natural resources on state parks, building toward an understanding of the "deferred maintenance" in natural resources stewardship.

7. **Natural Areas Report:** Pavola mentioned that DNR is seeking an operating budget enhancement of \$970,600 for the Natural Areas and Natural Heritage programs for the 2017-2019 Biennium and a capital budget for natural areas projects statewide in the amount of \$4,485,000. Pavola distributed a written report for the program that includes highlights from each DNR region natural areas staff, a grant/capital project table with current status, and the DNR fact sheets for both the operating and capital budget. Paul McFarland, natural areas manager in DNR's Northwest Region, reviewed the

prairie and balds restoration partnership in the San Juans with the Samish Indian Nation's Department of Natural Resources, as noted in the written report.

- 8. Natural Heritage Program:** Gamon reported that Joe Arnett, NHP botanist, is helping organize the first of its kind Washington botanical symposium to be held at the UW Center for Urban Horticulture. DNR will be a co-sponsor.

John Fleckenstein, NHP zoologist, attended a workshop in southern Oregon on the topic of identifying fairy shrimp. The workshop was led by one of the leading experts on fairy shrimp. John has been reviewing the literature and conducting field work in an attempt to clarify the conservation status of the different species that occur in Washington.

Rebecca Niggemann, NHP GIS analyst and data manager, continues to work on the development of a map viewer to display Natural Heritage managed data on wetlands.

Pene Speaks is working as a volunteer for the Natural Heritage Program, attempting to revitalize the Registry program, which is a voluntary program that recognizes landowners who manage their lands in a compatible manner with rare species and/or high quality ecosystems.

9. New / Other Business

The next meeting will be held March 24 in Olympia. The June meeting will be on the 15th and 16th, most likely in Wenatchee. It will be in partnership with the Chelan-Douglas Land Trust

The meeting was adjourned at 1:00 pm.